

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

January 27, 2003

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*A message from
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings*



It is both a privilege and honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue outreach efforts to further inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government "by the people" is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

Elijah E. Cummings

**Congressman Elijah
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Congressman Cummings Initiates Historic Meeting with Senate Majority Leader

For the first time in recent history, Congressman Cummings, as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, initiated a meeting with the Republican Senate Majority leader. Congressman Cummings met with newly-elected Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) on Jan. 21 in Washington to discuss legislative priorities for the 108th Congress.

After the fallout of former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), who stepped down due to a pattern of racially-insensitive remarks, Congressman Cummings urged Senate Republican leaders to work more closely with the Caucus in order to better understand issues that are important to African Americans. The Jan. 21 meeting was the first step in building this relationship, Congressman Cummings said.

"The outcome of the meeting was good. Majority Leader Frist and I addressed common goals of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Senate Republican Leadership. The meeting was focused more on our shared goals rather than our differences," Congressman Cummings said.

At the meeting, Congressman Cummings and Majority Leader Frist outlined several key issues including eliminating healthcare disparities; providing high quality education for the nation's children; and making prescription drugs more accessible to the elderly who live on fixed incomes.

"We both share a deep concern for improving the healthcare system in this country. Closing the healthcare gap has been one my main legislative priorities. And Senator Frist, a medical doctor, has

been an major advocate in this area," Congressman Cummings said. "While I served as the co-chair of the House AIDS working group, Senator Frist helped advocate for increased federal funding for AIDS research."

Congressman Cummings noted, however, that there would be some disagreement on issues such as the confirmation of controversial federal judicial nominees, tax cuts for the wealthy and affirmative action policies.

"We have gotten off on a good start," Congressman Cummings said. "Majority Leader Frist has indicated his willingness to listen. While our first meeting was encouraging, we now expect action."

These action items include an economic stimulus plan that creates businesses and jobs, a prescription drug plan under Medicare, a Patients' Bill of Rights, closing the educational achievement gap, and making every vote count in our elections.

"The meeting with Majority Leader Frist was an important step in a shared journey to better serve the American people," Congressman Cummings said.

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Congressman Cummings Pays Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In honor of the day dedicated to the late Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., Congressman Cummings participated in several local events by sharing Dr. King's message of peace.

On Sunday, January 18, Congressman Cummings addressed a crowded auditorium at Long Reach High School in Columbia, Maryland.

The event, sponsored by the Howard County Martin L. King, Jr. Holiday Commission, was entitled "Guided by his Message-United by his Dream." The audience listened with enthusiasm as Congressman Cummings delivered an inspirational message honoring Dr. King's legacy.

"Dr. King dreamed of a day when people of all races, religions, and nationalities could come together in unity," Congressman Cummings noted. "As I look at the diversity represented by those assembled here tonight, I am encouraged by how far we have come in realizing Dr. King's dream."

Congressman Cummings also urged the audience to "be bold, and take risks". He emphasized the importance of keeping the spirit of Dr. King alive by battling injustices, such as racism and poverty, that still exist in this country.

Many people who attended the event gained a new sense of determination.

"It was a defining moment to hear Congressman Cummings speak so passionately about Dr. King," said Jerome Roberts who traveled from Washington, DC to hear the speech. "The message I received established a good framework for celebrating Dr. King's holiday and honoring his legacy."

Congressman Cummings also participated in Project P.L.A.S.E.'s (People Lacking Ample Shelter and Employment) 4th Annual Martin L. King, Jr. Celebration in Baltimore, the Beth Shalom 5th Annual Interfaith Service in Columbia, and the Liberty Road Ecumenical Clergy's Annual Martin L. King, Jr. Program in Randallstown.

Congressman Cummings and Sen. Ted Kennedy Announce Support of Affirmative Action Policies at Public Universities

Longtime civil rights advocate Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) joined Congressman Cummings for a press conference on Jan. 15 to condemn President Bush for opposing affirmative action policies for higher education admissions.

Within an hour of the press conference, the Bush Administration filed an *amicus brief* in two Supreme Court cases that could

completely abolish inclusive admissions policies at the University of Michigan and the University of Michigan School of Law (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, *et al* and its undergraduate programs (*Gratz v. Bollinger*).

Congressman Cummings pointed out that in filing the *amicus brief*, President Bush was contradicting his statements of racial unity made just weeks ago.

Actions speak louder than words, Mr. President. That is our message to you today," Congressman Cummings said at the nationally-televised press conference.

Senator Kennedy added, "The action the Administration is taking today further divides this nation. It's just one more indication that while Republican leaders are engaged in a charm offensive with African Americans, Hispanic Americans and other minority populations, they refuse to take real actions to help those citizens."

Congressman Cummings then announced that the Congressional Black Caucus plans to file an *amicus brief* supporting the University of Michigan.

In the legal profession, business and the other professions, Americans of color and women already face a "glass ceiling" in our struggles to be fully included in this society," Congressman Cummings said. "Now, the opponents of programs like the University of Michigan's want to re-establish a glass floor – and shatter that glass floor from beneath our feet."

On a local level, Congressman Cummings emphasized that prior to the implementation of diversity policies, very few African American students attended the University of Maryland.

"But today because of minority recruitment efforts, more than 12 percent of the student body at the University of Maryland at College Park is African American," Congressman Cummings said.

"Yet, even with these minority recruitment efforts, the university's African American population is not proportional to the state's population of 27 percent."

Studies have shown that if affirmative action programs are eliminated, the African American student population at universities across the nation could drop as low as 2 percent.

"Affirmative action policies must be continued in order to increase higher education opportunities for all Americans," Congressman Cummings said.